

# Toilets on temple land and our treatment of minorities



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In Patuakhali stands Srimangal Buddha Bihar, a 240-year-old temple, which is regularly frequented by local devotees and those visiting Kuakata sea beach. Suffice to say, local residents hold immense respect for this establishment as it has become an embodiment of their faith over two centuries. But for the local authorities, this is not a good enough reason to protect the temple's sanctity. They would rather cater to the tourists, in an utterly disrespectful way, by encroaching upon the establishment's land to build public toilets.

Naturally, officials of the Kuakata municipality have drawn flak from the local Rakhine community, who have been vehemently protesting the move. And yet, the municipal mayor has not budged from the decision, saying that the land belongs to the municipality. He reiterated his commitment to tourists, neglecting the people who likely elected him to serve local interests.

There's a long-standing land dispute between the temple authorities and Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), with a case waiting to be disposed of. In February 2021, a court issued an injunction prohibiting the construction of any structure on the contested land. But the municipal officials have decided to pay no heed, with their workers already building the structure's roof.

This blatant disregard, of local sentiments and the law, has prompted the local ethnic minority community to conclude that vested interests are at play. The move is motivated, stated an application filed with Patuakhali's deputy commissioner. "Some influential people are trying to grab our land on the pretext of constructing toilets," said a local. It's a ploy to evict the community, reads the aforementioned statement.

Such apprehensions definitely have merit, because time and again, we have observed

how land of ethnic and religious minorities has been coveted and grabbed. These groups are not only losing their homesteads, gardens, trees, forestlands or lakes, their cremation grounds are also being grabbed by the state or people patronised by the state, said rights activist Sultana Kamal.

In 2022, Garo and other ethnic minority communities stood against the Forest Department's decision to create a lake in Tangail's Madhupur area by excavating their agricultural land, a move undertaken to attract tourists. The year before, the Mro community protested the construction of a five-star resort and entertainment centre on their ancestral land in Chittagong Hill Tracts. Let's not forget that the Madhupur Eco Park Project, undertaken in 1966, and Sajek Tourism Complex, created in 2012, forcefully displaced Indigenous communities from their traditional lands.

There is a clear pattern here. For some reason, the welfare of tourists supersedes that of the local residents. Because at the heart of it, those with power seem to care little about rights and values; it's all about ensuring economic gains—in whichever way possible. And since tourists bring the money, the choice is simple.

Let's remind ourselves that for many Indigenous communities, land is sacred; for tourists, it's just another travel destination to check off their bucket lists. A temple on such a land, with ancient idols buried underneath, is the epitome of sanctity. And yet, for the authorities, it's the tourists' convenience that dictates what these sites should facilitate.

An opinion piece by Myat Moe Khaing states, "To many outsiders, such invasions make sense because the CHI is being 'developed.' The 'backdated' paharis are finally coming in touch with 'civilisation.' The very categorisation justifies intervention through



FILE PHOTO: STAR

Did the Kuakata municipal authorities, out of courtesy, even ask whether building toilets on the temple land would be okay?

development policies. Is it really development if you are constructing an amusement park?"

Indeed, experts say such actions are just part of settler colonialism, the evidence of which is overwhelming. How many times have we heard about attacks on Indigenous communities? Last year, over a dozen homes in a Mro village in Bandarban were attacked, allegedly by a rubber plantation, to drive the locals away. The year before, land grabbers reportedly linked with the ruling party confined Munda families in Shyamnagar's Dhumghat village at gunpoint and destroyed their crops.

Despite many espousing the local benefits of such "development," locals clearly are not

of the same opinion. Hence, one can safely assume who the real beneficiaries are.

While the temple's land in Kuakata is contested, the fact remains that a structure of reverence sits on top of it. Any attempt to undermine this fact will be deemed communal—as has been done. Are the authorities not aware of this? Surely, they have heard about the countless arson attacks and vandalism temples around the country have been subjected to. Surely, they know this is a sensitive matter. So, even if the land belongs to the municipality, why are they hellbent on continuing with this disrespect? As an editorial of this newspaper put it, "Would the authorities have done the same if there were,

for example, a 200-year-old mosque in its stead?"

Did the municipal authorities, out of courtesy, even ask whether building toilets on the temple land would be okay? Most likely not, because historically, the opinions of minorities have fallen on deaf ears. Dipayan Barua, a member of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, said, "Many places are lying idle where toilets can be constructed. But they [the Kuakata municipal authorities] have chosen the temple's land." Why? This event is just the latest example of how our country caters to the needs, values, opinions and welfare of the minorities—disgracefully. The land, however, deserves all the attention.

## A wake-up call for sustainable supply chains



RMG NOTES

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more sustainable—recycled, in this case—products? Perhaps it's time to put that phrase to bed. Maybe it's also time to stop taking so seriously the dozens of surveys we see every year claiming that sustainability pays from a business perspective. There is very little evidence of this in fashion supply chains, from what I can see.

textiles and the cost of doing business is cheaper? Again, it is impossible to know for sure, but that, in my view, would certainly be a factor worth consideration.

Another thought I had on this is that Asian supply chains have, for many decades, complained that fashion brands say one thing publicly and do something quite differently when it comes to price. Renewcell has found out the hard way how unforgiving fashion supply chains are and how sensitive the market is to even tiny price differences.

Many people have made this point when discussing the company on social media, arguing how unjust it is that Renewcell has not had better support from fashion brands. They make a valid point, but I hope this whole debate will also shine a brighter light on the issue of how fashion brand suppliers across the world are treated—not just those in Europe.

This disconnect between the stated aims of sustainability and what happens in the real world is a global problem. In Bangladesh, for example, it is not always the most progressive, sustainable suppliers who win the business. Price still regularly trumps all and investment in green technologies and cleaner production methods offers no guarantees of success.

In many ways, then, Renewcell's fall from grace is an inflection point for our RMG industry. What type of industry do we want to be? Will we always turn our backs on more sustainable products because they cost a few dollars more? Will others in this field look at Renewcell's experience and get cold feet? Will investors choose to put their money elsewhere? And if so, where does this leave the green agenda?

The dust continues to settle on this issue and, who knows, Renewcell might make an unlikely comeback under different owners or with some fresh investment. I live in hope and remain optimistic, but even I can recognise that our industry has some serious soul-searching to do.

Most of us by now have read about Renewcell, the Swedish recycling technology company which recently filed for bankruptcy. I have followed the textile recycling sector closely in recent years, but—like many—I simply did not see this coming. Or, rather, I did not see Renewcell encountering the kind of difficulties that it did towards the end of 2023, when it became apparent that the company's order book was weakening.

Around that time, many of us began to cross our fingers and pray that things would pick up for Renewcell. The hope was that the company was simply experiencing teething problems, and that market sentiment would soon shift in its favour. The recent decision to file for bankruptcy suggests Renewcell's problems were more profound than we hoped.

So what went wrong and what, if any, lessons can we learn from this? Let's go back to my original point: that Renewcell's demise was very much out of the blue. The business, for those not familiar with its work, developed a process that recycles cotton-rich clothing such as jeans and produces Circulose, a dissolving pulp that can be used to make man-made cellulosic fibres (MMFCs).

These recycled fibres are precisely what fashion brands have been telling the world they want for the past decade. Indeed, many brands have made commitments to include significant proportions of recycled fibres in their clothing collections in the future.

This is why Renewcell has become a darling of the



Renewcell developed a process to recycle cotton-rich clothing to produce Circulose, a dissolving pulp that can be used to make man-made cellulosic fibres.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

fashion press. Swedish brand H&M invested and became a shareholder in Renewcell in 2017 and signed a five-year, 10,000-tonne deal with the company.

Many other brands and retailers have launched capsule collections containing Circulose. These include Levi's, Inditex (Zara), Ganni, Pangai, Filippa K, and Bestseller (Vero Moda).

But none of this, it would seem, has been enough to protect Renewcell from the volatility of the global fashion industry. Rumours had it that customers would not pay the premium its fibres retailed for. This is interesting, because how many times have we heard that customers will pay extra for

What many people are scratching their heads about here is how a business, which achieved global publicity and convinced customers to make huge public commitments, ends up having to declare bankruptcy. I can only surmise that there was small print in these "commitments" that meant they weren't quite the guarantee of market success that they seemed. Perhaps more details will emerge later.

Other lessons and questions spring to mind. Was Renewcell's cost base in Sweden—where wages are among the highest in the world—a barrier to its progress? Should the company have been closer to Asia where there is a greater abundance of waste

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

- 1 Whiskey servings
- 6 Herring's cousin
- 10 Return to base
- 11 "Shut up!"
- 13 Corduroy feature
- 14 Missouri tribe
- 15 Mamie's husband
- 16 Back on a boat
- 18 Martini base
- 19 Some football runs
- 22 Spectrum color
- 23 Despise
- 24 Sensational
- 27 Bit of gossip
- 28 Region
- 29 Golfer's goal
- 30 Bowling alley features

35 Start of a count

- 36 Make a choice
- 37 Derby or boater
- 38 Gaucho's rope
- 40 "The Evil Dead" director Sam
- 42 Writer Sontag
- 43 The Yokum boy
- 44 Department store section
- 45 Equals

**DOWN**

- 1 Get naked
- 2 7-syllable poem
- 3 Poet Nash
- 4 Gentle pull
- 5 Grabbed with a toothpick
- 6 "Ivanhoe" writer
- 7 Possesses

8 Servant for taverns, e.g.

- 9 Investigate
- 12 Less relaxed
- 17 Nourished
- 20 Court event
- 21 Peace, in Swahili
- 24 Tasks for Hercules
- 25 Heavy metal
- 26 Let go
- 27 Seedy building
- 29 Vitality
- 31 Speckled horses
- 32 German river
- 33 New parent, for example
- 34 Mixes up
- 39 Shoe color
- 41 Presidential nickname



### SATURDAY'S ANSWERS

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Tender ID No.	Package no. & Name	Tender Documents Last selling (Date & Time)	Tender Closing & Opening (Date & Time)
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